President Raul Castro Visits Moscow to Discuss Joint Projects

06/05/2015

Cuban President Raul Castro met with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin Wednesday to discuss increased bilateral cooperation with Russia and the implementation of joint projects.

Russia's Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev also met with Castro to discuss economic and trade cooperation between the two countries and joint projects in the health, energy, and transport sectors, according to RT. He is also scheduled to visit the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarca Kiril, on Friday.

Cuba and Russia Sign Judicial Agreement

This content was originally published by teleSUR at the following address: http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/President-Raul-Castro-Visits-Moscow-to-Discuss-Joint-Projects-20150506-0004.html. If you intend to use it, please cite the source and provide a link to the original article.
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Castro's visit responds to an invitation from Russian President Vladimir Putin to attend celebrations marking 70 years since the end of World War II and victory over facism in Europe. Victory Day celebrations honoring the defeat of Nazi Germany will take place May 9.

This is Castro's third trip to Moscow as Cuban president after visiting in 2009 and 2012.

After concluding talks in Moscow, Castro will travel to the Vatican for a private meeting with Pope Francis on Sunday in advance of the pontiff's visit to Cuba this September during his Latin

American tour. According to Vatican spokesperson Federico Lombardi, the visit is a private engagement, not an official state meeting.

Pope Francis, the first Latin American pope, was active in encouraging the renewal of diplomatic ties between Cuba and the United States by leveraging Vatican relations with both countries.